

# FTC Consumer Alert

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Office of Consumer and Business Education

## Trouble @ the In-Box

Do you receive lots of junk email messages from people you don't know? It's no surprise if you do. Just as more people use email as part of their daily routine, many marketers use email messages to pitch their products and services. Some consumers say they find unsolicited commercial emails — also known as “spam” — annoying and time consuming; others say they have lost money to bogus offers that arrive via email.

**The good news? The Federal Trade Commission says you can stop the surge of spam.**

**Here's how:**

- Don't respond. If you do, the spammer will have confirmation that your email address is active — and probably will spam you again. If the spammer's return address is invalid, your message will go as far as your Internet service provider (ISP) and increase the burden on its email system.
- Protect your email address. Don't give it to anyone you don't want to have it. Use a second email address for public activities, like participating in newsgroups or maintaining a web page. Often, spammers use software to “harvest” email addresses from chat rooms, web pages, on-line bulletin boards and Usenet postings.
- Read the fine print. When you register for services or order products online, don't give out your email without knowing how it will be used. Read the website's privacy policy to determine if the site protects your email address and other personal information. If the site doesn't have a privacy policy, consider taking your business to a site that does.
- Filter or Forward. Use spam filter software or an email forwarding service that will filter spam for you. Check with your ISP about filter services they provide for your email account, and ask the ISP how it's protecting you from spam.

**If you respond to unsolicited email, the FTC suggests that you:**

- Treat it the same way you would treat an unsolicited telemarketing sales call. Don't believe promises from strangers.
- Greet “get rich quick” or other money-making opportunities that arrive at your in-box with skepticism. Although some of these messages are from legitimate marketers, many are old-fashioned scams via the newest technology.
- Delete emails that say you can make money by sending money to people on a list. The email may claim that the scheme is legal, that it's been reviewed or endorsed by the government or that obscure sections of U.S. law legitimize the scheme. Don't believe it. Chain letter schemes, online and off, are illegal — and nearly everyone who participates in them loses money.
- Don't pay into a pyramid scheme with the idea that you'll make money recruiting others. Pyramid schemes are illegal — and big money losers.
- Ignore offers to erase accurate negative information from your credit record. There's no legal way to do it. Legitimate banks don't issue credit cards without checking your credit first.
- Forward spam to the FTC at [uce@ftc.gov](mailto:uce@ftc.gov).

For more information about protecting your privacy online, identifying scams and filing a complaint, visit the FTC at [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov). Click on Consumer Protection for a list of subjects, and click on Complaint Form to file a complaint. Or call the FTC toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP.